

**Saint Paul Planning Commission
City Hall Conference Center
15 Kellogg Boulevard West**

Minutes March 18, 2011

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, March 18, 2011, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present: Mmes. Merrigan, Porter, Reveal, Thao, Wencl; and Messrs. Connolly, Fernandez, Gelgelu, Kramer, Nelson, Ochs, Oliver, Schertler, Spaulding, Ward and Wickiser.

Commissioners Absent: Mmes. *Halverson, *Perrus, *Wang, *Young; and Mr. *Commers.
*Excused

Also Present: Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Nancy Homans, Mayor's Office; John Maczko and Allen Lovejoy, Public Works Department; Penelope Simison, Anton Jerve, Matt Wolff, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes February 18, 2011.

MOTION: *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of February 18, 2011. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

II. Chair's Announcements

Commissioner Wencl, who is the Commission's first vice chair, chaired the meeting. She had no announcements.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Donna Drummond announced that the web link to information about items before the Planning Commission and its committees will be added to all future Planning Commission agendas. She thanked Commissioner Ochs for making this suggestion. On March 14, 2011 the City made a flood emergency declaration and there is a graph on the City's main web page that shows the river elevation. Major LRT construction is getting underway and lane shifts are starting today at the western end of University Avenue. All traffic will go to the north side of the street and work will start on the south side. A special program has been set-up by the Chambers and all the business groups working on supporting businesses through LRT construction. A discount card can be obtained to use at participating businesses along the corridor to get discounts on purchases. For more information go to www.centralcorridorperks.com.

IV. Zoning Committee

SITE PLAN REVIEW – List of current applications. (*Tom Beach, 651/266-9086*)

Two items will come before the staff Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, March 22, 2011. They are: Metro Transit located on Hwy 61 at Lower Afton Road, Hwy 61, a park & ride parking lot expansion; and Banbro Office/Warehouse located at 946 Pierce Butler Route, Hi Bay warehouse, a two story office and warehouse showroom.

NO BUSINESS

Commissioner Kramer announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, March 24, 2011.

V. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Commissioner Merrigan announced the items on the agenda for the next Comprehensive Planning Committee meeting on Tuesday, March 29, 2011.

VI. Neighborhood Planning Committee

District 6 Small Area Plan – Approve a resolution initiating the preparation of a small area plan and a map depicting study area, including the boundaries of adopted small area plans within District 6. (*Penelope Simison, 651/266-6554*)

Commissioner Spaulding said they met and discussed the rationale for a District 6 Small Area Plan, and the need to update it. There is a motion in the memo from the Neighborhood Planning Committee to initiate a small area planning process in District 6, the North End.

MOTION: *Commissioner Spaulding moved the Neighborhood Planning Committee's recommendation to approve the resolution initiating the preparation of a small area plan and a map depicting study area. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

Commissioner Wencil announced the items on the agenda for the next Neighborhood Planning Committee on Wednesday, March 23, 2011.

VII. Central Corridor LRT: Release of Contingency Funds – Informational presentation by Nancy Homans, Mayor's Office and John Maczko, Public Works.

Nancy Homans, representing Mayor Chris Coleman's office, provided an update regarding the Central Corridor LRT project that is moving into high gear. They are working with a \$957 million budget and half of it is coming from the federal government and half is coming from local sources. One of the good things about this project is that it is being built at a time when the market is conducive to good bids. As the bids came in they were lower than estimated so there are some extra funds referred to as the under bid. The question is whether the project should be allocating those savings to other items along the corridor, for elements that the project couldn't afford to include in the past. Metropolitan Council requested that the various jurisdictions along the line submit ideas about how those funds might be used to support project components that

they were not able to pay for the first time through. However these are wish lists, each of the jurisdictions are submitting them and they are not sure which items will be eligible for funding under project requirements. The Federal Transit Administration has strict guidelines on what can be paid for and cannot be paid for as part of these projects. They are in the very early stages of this process, submitting ideas and lists. Ms. Homans talked about what is on the list at this point from the City of Saint Paul. First on the list are streetscape items, which are project components that the project could not pay for, but the City committed to pay for since the project was digging up and replacing the streets and now is the time to make these improvements and ensure the project is done right. The downtown Fourth and Cedar block is where the LRT line is going to move diagonally through this block and make the shift from Cedar to Fourth Street going to the Union Depot and the operations & maintenance facility (OMF). The improvements discussed for the Fourth and Cedar block include a vertical connection between the station platform and skyway system. The OMF is going to be in the southern part of the old Gillette building off of Broadway and Prince Street. Prince Street is a vacated street and the Metropolitan Council has agreed to give the City back the north half of that vacated street, which went with that property. This is a good time to improve that street and have it be part of the circulation system for the new ball park the City hopes to build on the north side of the OMF. The St. Anthony Park Community Council had some ideas about improving the pedestrian crossing over Hwy 280. There is a narrow sidewalk there and improvements would make it a more attractive pedestrian connection between the two cities.

Ms. Homans said there are also a series of parking improvement ideas. She named some areas where there seemed to be a critical need for parking. The northwest corner of Raymond and University has a lot of parking pressure, but there is a lot of behind parking behind those buildings. However, they have not been able to organize themselves to share parking. So the question is would there be a public role in making that public parking and having people pay to maintain it and share that space, if so that would require some public investment to make it work? Similarly on the southwest corner of University at Western between Western and Arundel there is a lot of parking and a lot of demand. The question is, is that an appropriate place for the City to get involved and help businesses share parking? Regarding the alley improvements, during and after construction the alleys are going to become more significant. The City is already doing \$350,000 of work to improve alleys along University. The City does not have control over the decisions on the budget, but the wish list is consistent with the conversations they have had with community people over the last four years.

Commissioner Reveal asked if the federal share of the project is not forthcoming, leaving just the local share, would the City have more discretion on the project budget or would it be subject to the same requirements and constraints?

Ms. Homans said her assumption is that they would have a little more discretion. However, the City is not considered a funding partner so the City is putting this wish list in front of the funding partners, which are the two rail authorities, the Metropolitan Council, and the federal government, at their request.

Commissioner Porter asked whether the under bid portion is over and above the project contingency.

Ms. Homans said that is exactly right. When the project was designed the federal government, having had years of experience with projects coming in over budget, required a very significant

allotment for contingency. The majority of that contingency they want to hold onto at this point to cover unforeseen costs as they get into construction of the project.

Commissioner Spaulding asked for more detail regarding the alley improvement discussions both during and after the construction.

Ms. Homans said that they acknowledge that this is a longer term issue and question and it's going to require a lot of involvement of the property owners on both sides of the alleys. For this early initial stage they are focusing on alleys where there was a critical parking issue, where they expect construction access pressure. So these alleys are the first that will be improved through the \$350,000 that is available. They are doing the basic minimum that needs to be done now, but they do acknowledge that this is a longer term policy question.

Commissioner Connolly said regarding the parking improvements does that investment come along with any kind of noticeable change in the business model of how the ramps are run? If there is demand that would require that much investment, can the prices be raised?

Ms. Homans said that for the two parking projects she mentioned, there is no anticipation of building a ramp. The arrangement would be similar to the shared parking lot near Snelling and Grand Avenues, where the cost of maintaining the lot is assessed to the benefitting businesses. The Spruce Tree ramp is a business question and she does not know the details of how that would be financed. The notion of how that is priced once light rail is here is going to be a critical one.

Mr. John Maczko with the Department of Public Works distributed a spreadsheet with the details of the City's wish list for enhancements for the Central Corridor Light Rail project, including estimated costs. This document went to the Metropolitan Council for consideration. It list twenty (20) items that are not in priority order as they have not been prioritized yet.

Mr. Maczko gave an update about the construction on University Avenue. At the west end of University there has been predominately utility work done to date. The project has begun and on Monday, 3/21/11, starting at Emerald, they will start the milling operations to remove the pavement and then after that start to dig into the soils below for utility work. The project on the west end from Emerald to Hamline is expected to take the full construction season up to November 30th. The goal is one construction season of impact, meaning there is the center guideway and then the two-lanes on each side. The roadway portions and the sidewalk portions will all be done by November 30th of this year. However, there will still be work going on over the next three years in the middle guideway section where the tracks will be. Also starting on Monday there will be milling of the Fourth Street section between Broadway and Wacouta on Fourth Street. Fourth Street will be finished this year and they will start laying the track in May.

There is some road construction that has to be done from Wacouta to Broadway and they are going to leave the section of Broadway off due to the anticipated flood that may have to be dealt with. So reconstruction on Fourth Street will be done by the end of July and the guideway and the track will be in. The area in front of the Depot remains to be constructed and that is going to be constructed from July through November.

At Snelling and University Avenue that is a big project in and of itself. There are eight (8) different phases on construction that will be occurring while keeping Snelling Avenue functioning. Work on Snelling could start for the whole season in about the next 3 to 4 weeks,

and they will work to get information out to the businesses. The requirement has been that all of the utility and LRT contractors have to work together through this process.

The south side of University should be completely reconstructed by July and traffic shifted to that side by about late July. The shift will be done sooner on the west end because that is where the construction is starting first. Downtown construction on Cedar will start around the first of June from Seventh Street to Fifth Street and run through this season and next season. Cedar will not be open to through traffic but will be open and accessible to Town Square, Macy's and the other surrounding buildings, although at times the entrances to these building will change. The Bremer building at Fourth and Cedar is scheduled to come down in April. The skyway link there will be reconstructed but will be out of service from the time the building comes down until about the beginning of November when it should be back up and functioning. The area east of the Capitol should be finished by the end of this year with the new alignment. Then construction will move on to University Avenue in back of the Capitol.

In 2012 the area between the Capitol and Hamline will be done. At the end of 2012 the major disruptive work will have been completed, and after that they will be working in the center guideway with station completion, rail construction, and pavement pouring and testing the trains. For information on downtown construction and alternate routes go to the Public Works web site and on the left side of page click on downtown construction alternate routes. There is a downtown construction map and lots of other information about the construction.

Commissioner Nelson was asked by a concerned person about bicycling, will bicycling be allowed along University Avenue after light rail transit is in?

Mr. Maczko said that there were desires to have a dedicated bike lane on University Avenue but that is not possible. Bikes would mix in with traffic and they are allowed to ride on University and there is no ban proposed.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director added that the Central Corridor Bike Walk Action Plan does identify alternate east, west routes north and south of University Ave. that will make it easier for people to bicycle near the corridor.

Commissioner Schertler clarified that the Bremer Bank is going to be taken down this summer and the skyway will be down until this November so is the new skyway going to be patched into the athletic club?

Mr. Maczko said that the skyway is going to be reconstructed as a temporary skyway, and at some point the block will be redeveloped and the skyway will become part of a development building.

Commissioner Spaulding said returning to the parking improvement issues along the corridor, what is the process or how are the areas identified where shared parking arrangements might be an opportunity? Is there a systematic approach to identifying those and then prioritizing those or engaging stakeholders in that process?

Ms. Homans said there was a very extensive Central Corridor Parking study, led by City staff. It identified where we were losing on-street parking where businesses depended on it. For example, on-street parking is being lost in front of the Target store, but Target doesn't depend on the on-

street parking on University Avenue. The study identified eleven (11) critical parking areas where businesses really depend on on-street parking. The property owners were all convened around day long workshops where design staff worked with them on what were the best solutions for them on that block. They came up with a variety of alternatives. To help fund these improvements the City allocated \$1.3 million to a neighborhood commercial parking program, where people applied for those funds.

Commissioner Porter said that she rides up and down University Avenue everyday and it is filled with pot holes and she realizes that Public Works does not want to put a lot of money into street improvements but are there any immediate plans to do something about the pot hole problem?

Mr. Maczko explained that at this time of year the pot holes develop faster then they can get to them, but Public Works is still continuing to fill the pot holes on University Avenue.

Commissioner Oliver said that when it comes to the under bid money and parking is the City limited to spending it on property that's connected to University Avenue or is the City allowed to look further up a bus corridor for other parking mitigation opportunities?

Ms. Homans said it is going to be a stretch to get parking on the corridor paid for with the project under bid money. They are making the case, but it is going to be a challenge and it would be even more of a challenge if it was any distance away from the corridor.

Commissioner Ward asked if there were any plans to look at attracting developers that want to build on some of the parcels that the HRA already owns along University Avenue and give some type of incentive for providing additional parking or doing some type of buffering in and around some of the residential areas that back up to the alleys.

Ms. Homans said that the City/HRA does not own very much property on University Avenue. Frogtown Square is an example of where the HRA was a participant in it. The HRA does own two parcels, one at 1433 University and one that was part of the former Saxon Ford dealership on the east end, that were purchased with Metropolitan Council/Minnesota Finance funds with the obligation to build affordable housing within the next 5 years. They also own a parking lot on St. Albans and University which will be used as part of the parking solution, but Ms. Homans is not aware of any other property that the City or HRA owns on University Avenue.

Commissioner Schertler wanted to know about the Metropolitan Council's old bus barn site, asking if they are going to vacate that for development or are they still planning on using it in the future.

Ms. Homans said that it is understood that it will be a development parcel when construction is complete.

Commissioner Wencil said that the University of Minnesota Center for Urban Design had proposed colored sidewalks and colored pavement concrete for bikeways and things like that and has Public Works adopted any of these proposals for the corridor or the city in general.

Mr. Maczko said that Public Works has often used colored concrete in the design of improvements and they work with the community on that. On University Avenue there will be colored crosswalks and colored corner intersections. And in the downtown there will be a

colored guideway to differentiate between the street and a light rail tracks. But Public Works has not adopted any citywide policies on this.

Commissioner Wencil asked whether the proposals for other projects within the city for colored sidewalks are always the same color.

Mr. Maczko said yes they always start with the standard concrete sidewalk and then they work with the communities to see if there are other things that they want to consider. Public Works preference is to stay with just standard concrete, but they understand that there are certain areas where adding color adds to the experience.

Commissioner Ochs asked about building enhancement and incorporating improvements into the surrounding streetscape in relation to the operations facility on Prince Street in Lowertown. Have there been any preliminary plans developed for how the façade would look on both the Farmers Market side as well as the south side?

Mr. Maczko said there will be a significant improvement of the façade on the Farmers Market side of the operations and maintenance facility. The south side of the building which runs along Prince and the river is the side that is basically is a concrete block wall. That is the side that the community would like to do something with. Improvements to this side are identified on the list of possible project enhancements to make that side more inviting.

Commissioner Ward commented on the Saint Paul interactive map. On that map there are different alternative routes and the capability to hover over a building or an area and come up with information. Who prepared this map for downtown and can this be done for University Avenue? Why is there a need to wait for Metropolitan Council to take that role?

Mr. Maczko said that the downtown web's information is being maintained by Public Works for the various projects such as Lafayette Bridge, Union Depot, and the LRT going on downtown. However there are so many varied projects going on downtown it is not possible for anyone else to keep up the map. On University Avenue, Metropolitan Council is the lead for the light rail transit project and the information on the project will need to be changed regularly. By the time the LRT project office would convey the information to get Public Works to update the map it would be out of date. So Public Works wants the project office and their contractors to update the map. It is much better to have the entity that is responsible for that big project to do it and in that case it's a major project with one entity in charge.

Commissioner Porter added that there is an existing communications team led by Robin Cauffman of Metropolitan Council and on that team there are representatives from the City of Saint Paul as well as a member of the construction team and U7, which is an organization that she is affiliated with. And they do talk about things like signage, what is the best way to get the message out etc. and this group meets on an ongoing basis.

VIII Transportation Committee

Commissioner Spaulding reported that the Transportation Committee met two weeks ago and discussed several items; the report on the downtown parking meters study, the streets and utilities CIB proposals, and revised guidelines and a preliminary discussion of the Public Works transportation construction projects public process. He also announced that the next

Transportation Committee meeting for Monday, March 21, 2011 has been cancelled.

IX. Communications Committee

Commissioner Thao had no report.

X. Task Force Reports

Commissioner Spaulding announced that on April 14th the Riverfront Corporation and Parks Department are having an open house for the Great River Park Master Plan at the River Centre in the evening. He will give more detailed information later. Commissioner Spaulding also announced that at 1:15 p.m. today there will be a ceremony to observe the beginning of demolition of the Pedro luggage building for the future Pedro Park, which is envisioned in the Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan.

XI. Old Business

None.

XII. New Business

None.

XIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by
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Planning and Economic Development Department,
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Respectfully submitted,

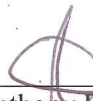


Donna Drummond
Planning Director

Approved

4-1-11

(Date)



Anthony Fernandez
Secretary of the Planning Commission